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Social Cohesion between the Member States of the European Union: Past Developments and Prospects for an Enlarged Union

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Abstract: The economic and social cohesion of Europe constitutes a main policy goal of the European Union. In this article a broad concept of social cohesion is proposed, which covers two principal dimensions: in addition to disparities in living conditions, which can be called the inequality dimension of social cohesion, social ties between countries are another important aspect, designated in brief as the social capital dimension. For both dimensions empirical analyses of selected indicators are presented. They address the question of whether the social cohesion among EU Member States increased during the past 15 years. Furthermore, the prospects for social cohesion within an enlarged EU are dealt with by analysing potential consequences that the accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland implies for social cohesion. The analyses reveal that social cohesion within the European Union did not really become stronger during the past 15 years. The entry of the three candidate countries would probably weaken social cohesion even further, especially owing to the limited public approval of their accession in many Member States. Social cohesion could be strengthened by greater solidarity between the prosperous and the 'backward' countries. The main prerequisites for this – mutual understanding, trustful relations, and a sense of community – may be enhanced by intensifying communication and interaction among countries.

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1. The concept of social cohesion

The concept of social cohesion emerged during the 1990s as a central policy goal at the national and the supranational level. There may be several reasons for the great interest politicians take in issues of social cohesion. First of all, the social cohesion of a society is viewed as a condition of its political stability and security. Inequalities and divisions within a society increase the risk of the political disruption and breakdown of the political system [Council of Europe 2000]. Second, social cohesion is considered a source of wealth and high economic performance, as has been demonstrated in several empirical research studies [for example, Putnam 1993; Hjerpe 1999; Ritzen 2001]. It is also important for

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other aspects of welfare, such as health, education and general subjective well-being [Rose 2000; Coleman 1988, Putnam 2001]. Third, deficiencies in social cohesion, such as weak social ties and a low level of social solidarity, may have the effect of increasing public expenditure, for example through the need to provide social services which would otherwise be performed by private networks of help and support or volunteer work.

The large degree of attention devoted to the goal of social cohesion in politics has been accompanied by a number of scientific works on conceptual issues and empirical questions¹. A review of these works shows that the concept of social cohesion has been used in a variety of meanings covering a multitude of aspects. At that it is not always clear whether these aspects are considered as constituents, causes, or consequences of social cohesion – a fact which of course does nothing to reduce the equivocal nature of the concept.

On a general level, social cohesion may be defined as a characteristic of a society which deals with the relations between societal units such as individuals, groups, associations, and territorial units [McCracken 1998], wherein different kinds of relations are the focus of interest. There have been various efforts to identify the dimensions of social cohesion and thus to contribute to a conceptual clarification [Jenson 1998, O'Connor 1998; Woolley 1998]. A review of this work reveals a rather high level of agreement on the key aspects of the concept of social cohesion, which may be subsumed under two main headings. As I have discussed elsewhere [Berger-Schmitt 2000, 2002b], I distinguish between two principal dimensions of social cohesion:

- (1) The first dimension can be shortly denoted as the inequality dimension. It covers all aspects of the distribution of welfare in a society: issues of equal opportunities among different population groups, the extent of disparities and social cleavages, and the amount of social exclusion and discrimination
- (2) The second dimension can be shortly denoted as the social capital dimension. It embraces all aspects which are generally considered as constituting the social capital of a society: social ties that bind, in terms of social contacts, shared values and norms, trust in other people and in societal institutions, feelings of solidarity, a sense of belonging to the same community and a common identity.

Alongside the distinction between the two dimensions incorporated in the concept of social cohesion, I suggest a differentiation be made between two levels of reference: a national and an international level. On the national level, inequalities and social ties *within* societies are of interest, while on the international level inequalities and social ties *between* societies are concerned. The present article is confined to this second perspective in dealing with the social cohesion between European countries.

¹ The literature and research reviews by Jenson [1998], Jeannotte [2000], OECD [2001] and Beauvais/Jenson [2002] provide a good overview.

2. Social cohesion among European countries

The economic and social cohesion of Europe has constituted a main policy goal of the European Union for several years, first declared in the Treaty on European Union in 1993 and repeatedly confirmed in many policy documents [e.g. European Commission 1997, 1998, 2000]. At the Lisbon Summit of the European Council in March 2000, the European Union's goal for the next decade was described as becoming "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" [European Council 2000, p. 2]. In subsequent meetings of the European Council² the strengthening of social cohesion was emphasised as one of the most important European policy concerns, too.

The significance of this policy goal also becomes evident in the demand for a Report on Economic and Social Cohesion in Europe every three years which was formulated in the Treaty on European Union. The second report, published in 2001, deals like the first report with the extent of the disparities among European countries and regions with respect to selected aspects of living conditions, e.g. gross domestic product per capita, poverty, employment and unemployment, education, and infrastructure. The reports thus concentrate exclusively on those aspects of economic and social cohesion which I attribute to the inequality dimension. In my view, this is too narrow a perspective, which overlooks other very important issues of the social cohesion among European countries that I have tried to describe by using the term 'social capital dimension': social ties among countries in terms of contacts and relations among their peoples, agreement in basic values, feelings of belonging to a common community or the emergence of a common European identity.

This article will address both dimensions of social cohesion. In particular, two main questions will be investigated:

- Has social cohesion among the member states of the European Union increased, that is, have disparities in living conditions diminished and social ties among countries increased? With respect to each dimension of social cohesion the development of selected indicators from the middle of the 1980s until the end of the 1990s will be analysed for the EU Member States.
- What changes to social cohesion can be expected from the eastward enlargement of the European Union? The large economic gaps between existing Member States and candidate countries are well known, but what about inequalities in other welfare components? And what are social ties between people from applicant countries and people from current EU Member States like? These issues will be examined by considering actual data on the EU countries and three applicants for membership – the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland – with respect to a selection of welfare indicators from different domains of life, as well as indicators of social ties.

² Especially the meetings in Nice, December 2000; Laeken, December 2001, Barcelona, March 2002.

2.1 The development of social cohesion among the Member States of the European Union

2.1.1 The development of disparities in living conditions

With regard to the question of whether living conditions in different EU Member States have become more similar over time an analysis was made of the developments of more than 20 indicators from several domains of life (Table 1). For each indicator, data from the middle of the 1980s, the early 1990s, and the end of the 1990s was compiled³. With respect to the first and the last points of measurement, Table 1 shows the figures for the country with the best situation, for the level reached by the country with the worst situation, expressed as a percentage of the best situation, and for the average level of all countries compared to the best one (overall disparity).

For the majority of the indicators, the Nordic countries, Luxembourg and the Netherlands prove to be the countries with the best situation, while most of the Southern European countries – Portugal, Spain, and Greece – along with Ireland are the Member States with the worst situation. This is especially true with respect to indicators of material wealth, education, employment, health, and social protection, while in reference to transport and environmental conditions the results are not uniform and no unique leading or lagging countries are indicated. There are no fundamental differences between the middle of the 1980s and the end of the 1990s in terms of the countries offering the most and the least favourable living conditions, but the size of the discrepancies between the top and the bottom indicator values has clearly diminished in many cases. However, the overall disparity of living conditions in the European Union considerably decreased in only 7 of the 22 indicators and even markedly increased in 7 other indicators. A reduction in disparities can be observed in all life domains with the exception of health, where the differences among countries have mostly widened.

A comprehensive picture of the development of the relative level of welfare in the individual Member States can be gained by adding up the index values of all indicators and computing the average value for each country and point of measurement. This comprehensive welfare index has an upper limit of 100, which is reached when a country is on top with respect to all 22 indicators. The results are displayed in Figure 1, which reveals that at the end of the 1990s the overall differences in living conditions among EU Member States are nearly as large as about 15 years ago, and most of the countries have maintained their relative levels of welfare. The highest level of welfare can be observed in Sweden, even though the gap in relation to the other countries has somewhat diminished. This is especially due to a relative decrease in the level of material wealth and an increase in unemployment in comparison with other European countries. The next welfare positions are occupied by Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Austria, which are characterised by relative improvements in living conditions. Finland, Germany, France, and Belgium show in comparison a medium and unchanged level of welfare. At the end of the 1990s the

³ Depending on the indicator the data is from 1985, 1986 or 1987 respectively 1991, 1992 or 1993 respectively 1997, 1998 or 1999.

United Kingdom is in a medium position, too, but the level of welfare has increased comparatively during the past 15 years, owing to relative improvements within the domains of education, employment and environment. Furthermore, as a result of positive developments in wealth, education, employment and social protection, Portugal has notably advanced. In contrast, the relative levels of welfare in Spain and in Ireland rose only slightly, and Greece has hardly reduced the gap between it and the countries offering the most favourable living conditions. Thus little progress has been made so far in achieving the goal of converging living conditions in the European Union.

2.1.2 The development of social ties

Disparities of living conditions in the Member States of the European Union represent only one dimension through which advances in social cohesion and European integration can be measured. As explained above, another equally significant dimension is the strength of social ties among people.

An important precondition for enhancing social relations, interactions and understanding between people from different countries is that of language skills. Being able to speak English, as the most widely known language, is especially useful for communication between people. Table 2 shows that the percentage of people who speak English well enough to take part in a conversation rose in all countries between 1987 and 1999. At the top of the ranking of countries are the Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark, where in 1999 more than three quarters of the population was able to speak English. In Luxembourg, Finland, and Austria the English language is widespread among about one-half of the population. By contrast, in Spain, Portugal, Italy, and France, English is spoken by only a minority, at less than one-third of the population, although compared to 12 years ago considerable improvements have taken place in these countries, too.

If one takes into account the major European languages other than English – German, French, Spanish and Italian – the results are similar. The percentage of people who speak at least one of these five languages in addition to their mother tongue has increased in most of the countries. In 1999 this skill was highest in Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden, where at least twice as many people as in Spain, Portugal, France, or Italy are able to converse in a foreign language. However, by far the least knowledge of foreign languages can be found among the English and the Irish, who obviously rely on the English proficiency of other people.

Therefore, as measured by their language abilities, the chances of developing relations with people from other European countries are rather good for the Dutch, the Luxembourgers, the Scandinavians and the Austrians, but rather poor in Spain, Portugal, France, and Italy.

Information about the actual relations among people from different European countries is based on the indicator of trust in other people. Mutual trust is considered to represent an important base for the development of a 'sense of community' [Deutsch et al. 1957, p. 36]. It is a prerequisite for establishing long-term co-operation between coun-

tries [Follesdal 2001; Gabriel 1999]. Thus, it is crucial for strengthening the social cohesion between European countries and promoting European integration.

In 1996⁴ the extent of trust in people from other EU countries was highest in the Scandinavian countries and in the Netherlands (Figure 2). These countries, as well as Luxembourg and Austria, are at the same time also the Member States of the EU which are most trusted by people from other countries. By contrast, all Southern European people not only express rather little trust towards other Europeans but are also rated low with respect to their own trustworthiness⁵. These results confirm earlier studies which revealed a correlation between the economic power of a country and the degree of trust it is ascribed with [Inglehart 1991]. Furthermore, the assumption stands to reason that trust between people of different nationalities is fostered by language skills, which facilitate communication and therefore enhance the opportunities of getting to know foreign people⁶.

In comparison with 1990 mutual trust among all Europeans somewhat decreased, but the decline is very pronounced with respect to the level of trust expressed by people in Portugal and Greece. In 1996, these two countries indicated by far the lowest degree of trust in other people, a result which is also confirmed by other Eurobarometer surveys conducted in 1997 using a differently worded question [Berger-Schmitt 2002a]. Possible reasons for the relative distrust of Southern European people, especially the Portuguese and the Greeks, may be their relatively low level of welfare compared to other countries of the European Union⁷. But despite this it can be held that social cohesion between European countries as measured by the indicator of trust did not increase within the period under consideration.

The extent of social cohesion in Europe can be evaluated not only by indicators of social relations between countries but also by indicators of ties between the individual countries and the larger collective they belong to, such as, for example, identification with Europe. The formation of a common European identity among citizens is an important political objective, which has been mentioned explicitly in the Treaty on European Union and the Treaties of Amsterdam and Nice. The identification of people with Europe and with the goals of European unification is crucial for the progress of European integration. Since political decisions at the level of the European Union affect more and more the personal living conditions of citizens, public support of European policy makers and the will-

⁴ This is the most recent data from the Eurobarometer which are comparable to data collected earlier, first in 1990. Before 1990 and in 1997 trust to people from other countries was measured by two other versions of the question. After 1997, the question about trust was not asked anymore.

⁵ It should be noted that the level of trust among the Southern European countries is not higher than between Southern European and Central or North European countries of the EU.

⁶ By means of Eurobarometer 44.0 conducted in 1995 it is possible to analyze the relation between knowledge of foreign languages and trust in people from other countries at the microdata level. The results show positive correlations between English proficiency and trust as well as between the abilities to converse in a particular language and trust in people from the respective country.

⁷ This hypothesis is supported by the positive correlation between trust and life satisfaction at the individual level.

ingness of citizens to co-operate are required [Münch 1999]. In this context, identification with Europe is considered to serve as a source of legitimisation for political decisions [Pfetsch 1998; Reese-Schäfer 1999]. Furthermore, especially with respect to the reduction of welfare disparities and financial equalisation between prosperous and poorer Member States a consciousness of belonging together and solidarity among people are required [Armingeon 1999; Habermas 1998; Lepsius 1997]. A European citizenship was introduced with the Treaty on European Union, also aimed at promoting the development of a sense of community and a common European identity among citizens [Follesdal 2001; Garcia 1997].

However, until now people's identification with Europe is not very strong and has not been rising significantly over the years. This can be documented for most of the EU Member States by the figures below (Table 3). In 1999 identification with Europe was especially weak in the United Kingdom, the Scandinavian countries, and Ireland. Furthermore, the two countries with the lowest degree of trust in people from other countries – Portugal and Greece – also felt a low level of affiliation with Europe, which has moreover been significantly declining since 1992. In contrast, the citizens of Luxembourg, Italy, and Spain have related to Europe to a rather high extent for many years.

The reasons for this mostly weak European identity are probably complex and differ in the individual countries. For example, the scepticism of the United Kingdom and the Scandinavian countries towards European integration is well known and is founded on a fear of a loss of autonomy and other negative effects of EU membership. But there may be other, more general reasons for the overwhelmingly low degree of identification with Europe. In the scientific discussion of this issue at least two arguments can be found. First, the democratic deficiency of the European Union, that is, the poor possibilities citizens have for influencing EU decision-making and the lack of transparency in the policy-making process, has been considered as detracting from the formation of a European identity among citizens. If people are only weakly involved in the political life of the European Union their awareness of a European common welfare and their loyalty towards EU institutions will hardly be encouraged [Habermas 1994, 1998; Garcia 1997; Hörnlein 2000]⁸. Second, the internal heterogeneity of Europe, that is, the disparities in living conditions, the lack of a common European culture, the diversity of languages and a divergence of values are deemed to constitute obstacles to the formation of a common European identity [Lepsius 1997; Fossum 2001; Immerfall 1997, Münch 1999].

2.2 The impact of the enlargement of the European Union on its social cohesion

If – according to the latter argument – the emergence of a European identity and a sense of community were hampered by the heterogeneity of the European Union, the accession of Central and Eastern European countries would further undermine social cohesion in

⁸ In response to these concerns the democratic legitimacy of EU decisions has been enhanced insofar as the power of the European Parliament was extended by the Treaty of Amsterdam.

two ways: on the one hand by widening disparities in living conditions, and on the other hand by the impact of an increasing heterogeneity on the sense of community.

In the next section, disparities in living conditions between the current EU Member States and three of the countries from the first group that is to join the EU, namely the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, will first be examined on the basis of the latest available data. The significance of EU enlargement for its social cohesion will then be evaluated with respect to the quality of social ties both between countries and to the European Union as a whole.

2.2.1 Disparities of living conditions between EU Member States and candidate countries

Analyses of the disparities between the EU Member States and the candidate countries have usually concentrated on economic indicators, and it is a well-known fact that there is a large economic gap between the current EU Member States and the applicant countries from Central and Eastern Europe. This discrepancy has proved to be even wider than in the case of previous enlargements, as has been demonstrated in comparisons of per capita GDP [Weise et al. 2001; Delhey 2001; Amato/Batt 1999]. It seems obvious that a convergence of income levels and the standard of living can only be reached by strong financial support from the EU and will require a substantial amount of time.

However, in view of the goal of strengthening economic *and* social cohesion the impact of enlargement on cohesion within the European Union should be analysed in a more comprehensive way. Indicators of welfare covering further life domains have to be included in assessing the extent of disparities of living conditions between EU Member States and candidate countries. This has been done in the following analyses of 26 indicators from several life domains similar to those considered in Table 1. For each of these indicators the EU country with the best situation and the relative positions of the 'worst' EU country and of the three candidate countries included are shown (Table 4). In addition, the total disparity across all EU countries is indicated, as well as the prospective disparity following the entry of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland into the EU.

First of all, the results confirm the wide discrepancies between EU Member States and applicants for membership with respect to indicators of wealth. The three candidate countries included clearly range below the least prosperous EU country, and the disparity in wealth within the EU would markedly increase if they were part of it. This is true with the exception of one indicator – the motorisation rate – which is higher in the Czech Republic than in the EU country with the lowest level of economic development – Greece. The Czech Republic also performs with respect to many other indicators better than Hungary or Poland. It is well known that it belongs to the most prosperous countries of the first wave of accessions, behind Cyprus and Slovenia.

Enlargement of the EU would also widen disparities in living conditions with respect to the availability of modern communication technologies. However, it should be noticed that the use of PCs and the Internet is more widespread in the Czech Republic than in Greece – the country at the bottom end in the range of EU countries. Also, in Hungary and in Poland, PCs are no less available than in Greece.

As for the indicators of all other life domains – education, employment, health, social protection, transport and environment – the inclusion of the three applicant countries into the EU would overwhelmingly result in only a slight increase of disparities or no increase at all. Furthermore, it should be emphasised that for most of these welfare indicators at least one of the candidate countries – and in many cases all of them – ranks higher than the EU country with the lowest performance level. There are some very large gaps to the disadvantage of the respective EU country with the least favourable situation, for example in the education level, the labour force participation of women, the ratio of physicians to inhabitants, the density of the railway network, the frequency of road accidents involving personal injury, and carbon dioxide emissions. A few indicators even show one of the candidate countries in a better position than the country in the lead within the EU: for example, the Czech Republic has the highest percentage of population aged 45–49 years with at least upper secondary education and has the most dense railway network.

An overall measure of welfare for each country was calculated in the same way as was done in Figure 1. This comprehensive welfare index, with a theoretical upper limit of 100, has a value of 53 in the Czech Republic and a value of 51 in Hungary and in Greece. Thus, the overall level of welfare in the Czech Republic and in Hungary is about as high as in Greece – the EU country offering the poorest living conditions – whereas Poland, with a mean index value of 47, compares rather badly.

These results show that it is important to differentiate between the candidate countries in assessing the consequences of EU enlargement on its economic and social cohesion. Measured against overall disparities of welfare the entry of the Czech Republic and Hungary into the EU will scarcely weaken its internal social cohesion. That these countries are lagging behind with respect to the level of wealth is set off by their relatively good positions in other important life domains. However, this cannot be held to be true for Poland and would be probably even less true for other applicants, especially those from the second group, such as Romania or Bulgaria.

2.2.2 Quality of social ties between EU Member States and candidate countries

Enlargement of the European Union may also change its overall social cohesion in terms of the kind of social ties which exist between the current Member States and the candidate countries. In considering these ties one can distinguish between the relations of the prospective to the present EU Member States and the European Union as a whole on the one hand, and, conversely, the relations of the EU Member States to the applicant countries on the other hand⁹. In the following section, first of all some indicators of people's relations to the European Union will be analysed, focusing on the candidate countries compared with the Member States. These indicators include identification with Europe and feelings of belonging, attitudes towards the country's membership in the European

⁹ Of course, relations among candidate countries are a further important component of the quality of social ties within an enlarged European Union, but this aspect will be left out of consideration here.

Union and trust in the European Union. Subsequently, some indicators of the relations of current EU citizens to applicant countries will be investigated, specifically the extent of trust in people from candidate countries and attitudes towards their entry into the EU.

However, before analysing mutual relationships between EU Member States and applicants for membership, in correspondence with section 2.1, it is worth taking a look at language skills as a significant factor for the development of social ties with foreign people. Among the candidate countries included in this investigation, knowledge of the English language is most widespread in the Czech Republic. In 2001, 24% of the Czechs were able to take part in an English conversation, compared to 21% of the Poles and only 14% of the Hungarians¹⁰. In most of the EU Member States the corresponding percentages of people are considerably higher¹¹. However, in the Czech Republic, English language skills are better developed than in Spain (18%) and Portugal (22%). Moreover, in each of the three candidate countries the percentage of people speaking English has nearly doubled within the last five years. In 1996, only 7% of Hungarians, 12% of Poles, and 12.5% of Czechs were able to converse in English¹². Comparatively good language skills in the Czech Republic can also be found with respect to other foreign languages. In 2001, the percentage of people who could speak – in addition to their mother tongue – at least one of the five major European languages (French, Italian, Spanish, German or English) reached 45% in the Czech Republic, a figure which was higher than in many EU Member States. For example, only 19% of the British, 23% of the Spanish, 33% of the Portuguese and 40% of the Greek people had a similar knowledge of foreign languages. In Poland and in Hungary, one-third and one-quarter of the population respectively possessed these language skills. Thus especially in the Czech Republic the preconditions for developing social relations and ties to people from EU countries are rather good or at least not worse than in some of the current Member States.

The actual attachment of the candidate countries to Europe as a whole can be assessed by means of several indicators (Table 5). In total they reveal that in the candidate countries feelings of belonging and identification with Europe are pronounced at least to the same extent as in the EU Member States. In 1995, the percentage of people who felt close to Europe was higher in each of the candidate countries than in any EU Member State. Especially in Hungary and in the Czech Republic, with percentages of 94% and 79%, a considerably larger part of the population than in the European Union felt close ties to Europe. A rather strong identification of people from candidate countries with Europe is also confirmed by more recent data from the year 2001. The data show for example that overwhelming majorities of Hungarians, Poles and Czechs are proud to be Europeans. In all EU Member States this is true to a lesser extent. Furthermore, the percentage of peo-

¹⁰ These figures have been published by the European Commission in the framework of the first results of the Candidate Countries Eurobarometer conducted in 2001 (http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/ceeb_en.htm).

¹¹ According to the data of Eurobarometer 55.1, 2001.

¹² These figures result from data of the Central and Eastern Eurobarometer conducted in the years 1990–1997.

ple in the candidate countries considering themselves not or not exclusively as nationals of their country but also as citizens of Europe exceeds that in many of the EU Member States.

In comparison with feelings towards Europe, attitudes towards the European Union reflect a less strong attachment. However, in all applicant countries the majority of the population think of the entry of their country in a positive way. In comparison with the views of the Member States on their membership in the EU, the percentage of people in the applicant countries considering membership as a 'good thing' is on a medium level. Another indicator of people's relations to the European Union – trust in the European Union – results in similar findings. As in most of the Member States the majority of the population of the candidate countries tends to trust the European Union. The extent of trust is especially high in Hungary, where 71 % of the population tend to trust it. Only in Luxembourg is this figure even higher. Also, with respect to nearly all of the other indicators considered, Hungary proved to be the candidate country with the strongest attachment to Europe and to the European Union.

As far as the relations of the EU Member States to the countries applying for membership are concerned, two kinds of indicators are available: the extent of trust in people from applicant countries and approval of their entry into the European Union. Trust as an important precondition for developing good relationships to other countries is decisive for the question of social cohesion in Europe. If the current EU Member States had a lower level of trust in the candidate countries than in each other, enlargement of the EU would certainly lower its social cohesion. Data from the year 1996 indeed show that people from all EU countries at that time trusted citizens from other Member States rather than nationals of the Czech Republic, Hungary or Poland (Figure 3). Favourable judgements of the candidate countries were made in the Scandinavian countries, the United Kingdom, Ireland and the Netherlands, where trust on the whole prevailed. By way of contrast, people from all other EU Member States expressed distrust more often than trust. The lowest levels of trust in applicant countries can be found in Portugal, Germany, Austria, Italy, Luxembourg, and Belgium. Compared to their positive ratings of EU countries, Germans and Austrians especially were rather distrustful of the applicant countries, while citizens of the United Kingdom, Ireland and Greece showed the least differences in the assessments between future and current EU Member States. The vast majority of the EU countries barely differentiated between candidate countries. Only Finland, Germany and Austria indicated somewhat more positive feelings towards Hungary than towards the Czech Republic or Poland.

It is important to note that in comparison with 1990 trust in the candidate countries declined in nearly all EU countries¹³. This had also been observed with respect to trust in other EU Member States, but in that case the decrease of trust was less pronounced. The result is quite surprising, since one would rather expect an increase of trust in the candidate countries in view of their political transformation and their application for EU mem-

¹³ In 1990 the mean ratings on the scale of distrust by the then 12 EU Member States amounted to 2,4 for Czechoslovakia as well as for Hungary and Poland. In 1996 the mean ratings of the same EU Member States amounted to 2,7 for each candidate country.

bership. If one had to interpret this result as indicating a tendency of EU citizens to dissociate from eastward enlargement of the EU, this would be a negative finding with respect to future social cohesion within the EU.

There are more recent data which show the actual degree of approval of an enlargement of the EU (Table 6). Approval of enlargement to include the applicants considered here is highest in Sweden, where nearly three quarters of the population are in favour of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland becoming part of the European Union. Also, in Denmark and in Greece the mass of the population has a positive view of the entry of these countries into the EU, and somewhat more than half of the population in Spain, Italy, Finland, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg support their accession. In all other EU Member States advocates of enlargement make up a minority. By far the lowest percentage of people in favour of accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland can be found in France. This is the only country where there are many more opponents than advocates with respect to each applicant for accession. The United Kingdom and Belgium also show a rather low extent of support for enlargement. The majority of Austrians are against the entry of the Czech Republic and Poland, but would approve of Hungary joining the European Union. Similar attitudes can be found in Germany, where people mostly approve of the accession of Hungary but not of the Czech Republic or Poland. Also, the Finnish population support the entry of Hungary to a larger extent than in the case of the other two countries. Austria's, Germany's and Finland's rather positive rating of Hungary compared to other candidate countries was also observed with respect to the level of trust in these countries. In the remaining EU Member States people make few distinctions between their attitudes towards the three countries.

Thus, all things considered, there is only limited support of eastward enlargement of the EU. This becomes particularly evident in view of the overwhelming approval the entry of countries like Switzerland or Norway would meet with. While about three quarters of all citizens of the EU would vote in favour of the entry of these countries, less than half of the population would be in favour of the Czech Republic or Poland. There is no EU country which would not prefer Switzerland or Norway over the Czech Republic, Hungary or Poland as future Member States, but the contrasts in rates of approval are especially strong in Austria, Belgium, Germany, and France. Worries over potential financial disadvantages as well as rising unemployment and fears of a decrease in importance of their own nations are among the most common reasons for this reluctance towards enlargement, as further analyses of the data reveal. Moreover, there is no evidence that younger generations are stronger advocates of enlargement than middle-aged or elderly people, so the prospects for social cohesion within an enlarged European Union are rather poor considering the attitudes of current towards future Member States.

On the other hand it should be noted that a lack of approval of enlargement does not necessarily mean disapproval, as considerable parts of the population did not form any opinion on this issue. Only about a third of the EU's population are explicit opponents to the accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary or Poland, while about a fifth feels unable to make a judgement. Further analyses prove that attitudes towards enlargement strongly depend on the amount of information people have on this issue. While among EU citizens

who feel very well informed about enlargement there are overwhelming majorities in favour of the entry of the Czech Republic (76%), Hungary (77%) and Poland (65%) and only about 5 % are undecided, less than a third of people who do not feel informed at all advocate the accession of these countries and about a third are undecided. Thus, there is a guarded hope that support for enlargement could be increased in the future through better information among the public.

3. Summary and conclusions

The economic and social cohesion of Europe constitutes a main policy goal of the European Union. It is usually conceived as a reduction of disparities in living conditions between European countries and regions. However, in this article a broader concept of social cohesion has been proposed. It is argued that the concept of social cohesion covers two principal dimensions. In addition to disparities of living conditions, which can be called the inequality dimension of social cohesion, social ties between countries are another important aspect, designated here as the social capital dimension.

Analyses of the development of social cohesion within the European Union revealed that not much progress has been made during the past 15 years. At the end of the 1990s overall disparities in living conditions between EU Member States were nearly as large as about 15 years ago, with Sweden at the top and Greece at the very bottom of the hierarchy of countries. Also, social ties, as measured by trust between nations and identification with Europe, showed hardly any increase in strength.

The prospects for social cohesion within an enlarged European Union are even worse, but this is not so much a result of widening disparities in living conditions, at least as far as the accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland is concerned. Inequality will primarily rise with respect to the level of wealth, but not with respect to many other welfare aspects which in the candidate countries mentioned here are mostly on at least the same level as in the EU countries in the worst situation. Social cohesion within an enlarged European Union will not be diminished by any weak social ties of the candidate countries to Europe either, since the sense of attachment to Europe and to the European Union is at least as strong as in the Member States. But social cohesion will be endangered by the relative distrust towards people from candidate countries and the low level of approval for their accession to the European Union among the populations of many Member States.

So the question arises of how social cohesion among countries can be strengthened, even in an enlarged European Union. Of course, a multitude of factors must be taken into account and there is no simple answer to this question. At this point some notes on the potential mutual dependence of the two dimensions of social cohesion should be given in order to point out that measures to promote one dimension may also improve the other.

On the one hand it should be taken into consideration that disparities in living conditions may detract from feelings of belonging together. People from countries with comparatively poor living conditions may feel excluded from the high level of welfare in other

countries and therefore cannot view themselves as a part of this community. Thus the sense of attachment to the European Union and the emergence of a European identity could possibly move forward through relative improvements to the living conditions in disadvantaged countries.

On the other hand an upgrade of living conditions in backward countries depends to a certain degree on the solidarity of the other Member States, especially their willingness to provide financial support. This presupposes mutual understanding, trustful relations and a sense of community which – according to Karl W. Deutsch's theory of integration – could be enhanced by increasing communication and interaction among countries [Deutsch et al. 1957]. Of course, knowledge of foreign languages is an important prerequisite for this. Improvements in the amount of information on other countries could also contribute to the development of trust and understanding between them. As far as the relations of EU citizens to the candidate countries are concerned more information on the enlargement of the EU and its benefits even for the current Member States is needed. An awareness of the interrelation between different aspects of social cohesion is crucial to any political measures aimed at strengthening overall social cohesion in the current as well as in an enlarged EU.

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Table 1. Selected indicators of living conditions – disparities between

Notes and sources:

(a) Indicator value of the country with the worst situation in % of the indicator value of the country with the best situation; in case of indicators 3, 10, 11, 13, 18–21 it is the indicator value of the country with the best situation in % of the indicator value of the country with the worst situation; (b) mean of the indicator values of all countries in % of the best situation; the lower this mean the greater the disparity.

(1) European Commission, National Accounts ESA, Aggregates 1970–1997;

(2) Federal Statistical Office of Germany, Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Ausland;

(3) European Commission, National Accounts ESA, Detailed Tables 1970–1994 and 1970–1997;

(4) UNESCO, Statistical Yearbook; (5) European Commission, Transport and Environment;

(6) OECD, Education at a Glance; (7) Pupils and students in upper secondary or tertiary education in % of the population aged 15–24 years; European Commission, Education Across Europe;

European Commission,

Statistical Yearbook; (8) Eurostat, Labour Force Survey; (9) (10) A, FIN, S: OECD, Labour Force Statistics 1979–1999; otherwise: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey; (11) (12) (17) (19) (21) European Commission, Statistical Yearbook; (13) (18) (20) WHO, Health For All Database; (14) OECD, OECD Health Data 2001; (15) 1985: OECD, OECD Health Data 2001; otherwise: European Commission, Statistical Yearbook; (16) OECD, Social Expenditure Database (22) European Commission, Eurobarometer Surveys; percentage of respondents who have “not very much reason” or “no reason at all” to complain with respect to all of the following environmental problems: quality of drinking water, noise, air pollution, waste disposal, damage done to the landscape.

Material Wealth

- 1) Gross Domestic Product per capita at 1990 Prices and PPS
- 2) Private Consumption Expenditure per capita at 1990 Prices and PPS
- 3) Share of Expenditure for Food, Beverages and Tobacco (%)
- 4) Television Receivers per 1000 Inhabitants
- 5) Passenger cars per 1000 Inhabitants

Education

- 6) Public Expenditure on Education as a Percentage of GDP
- 7) Participation in Upper Secondary or Tertiary Education (%)
- 8) Population aged 45–49 y. with at least Upper Secondary Education (%)

Employment

- 9) Labour Force Participation of Women (%)
- 10) Unemployment Rate (%)

Health

- 11) Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000)
- 12) Life Expectancy of Men at Birth (in years)
- 13) Consumption of Cigarettes per Year and Person aged 15 years+
- 14) Practising Physicians per 1000 Inhabitants

Social Protection

- 15) Share of Public Social Protection Expenditure in GDP (%)
- 16) Public Social Protection Expenditure per capita at 1995 Prices and PPS

Transport

- 17) Length of Railway Net per 1000 square km (in km)
- 18) Persons Injured in Road Accidents per 100.000 Inhabitants

Environment

- 19) Carbon Dioxide Emissions per capita (t)
 - 20) Sulphur Dioxide Emissions per capita (kg)
 - 21) Gross Domestic Consumption of Primary Energy per capita (toe)
 - 22) Population with Few Environmental Problems (%)
-

EU Member States 1985/87 and 1997/99

Country with best situation				Country with worst situation				Total Disparity ^a	
1985/87		1997/99		1985/87		1997/99		1985/87	1997/99
country	value	country	value	country	% of best ^a	country	% of best	%	%
L	19902	L	25795	P	37,6	GR	36	63,2	59,1
L	10627	L	14014	P	40,6	P	48,1	65,9	63
NL	16,8	D	13,9	IRL	42,1	IRL	45,6	67	73,3
DK	523	FIN	594	P	34	GR	38,6	69,4	75,9
S	458	L	572	GR	27,7	GR	44,4	68	70,7
S	7	DK	8,3	E	51,4	GR	42,2	74,2	64,1
B	58,7	UK	88,2	P	36,9	IRL	54	73,4	73,3
D	69,7	D	81,6	E	15,4	P	20,4	55	68,3
S	78,5	DK	76,1	E	42,9	IRL	59,9	65,5	78,1
L	2,6	L	2,4	E	12,2	E	15,1	37,5	36
FIN	6,3	S	2,9	P	35,4	GR	49,2	69,1	62,2
S, GR	74	S	76,9	L	94,1	P	93,2	97	96,9
NL	1333	S	867	GR	36,8	GR	25,8	62,2	49,4
I	3,8	I	5,8	UK	36,8	UK	29,3	63,5	55,4
S	31,1	S	33,3	P	37,3	IRL	48,3	74,9	79,4
DK	5570	L	8146	P	19,7	P	32,4	69,2	64,3
B	119	B	110	FIN	14,6	FIN	15,8	48	49,9
FIN	206	DK	183	A	25,5	B	25,8	54,7	51,2
P	2,8	P	4,8	L	10,4	L	23,6	38,7	58,3
NL	17,8	S	5,8	FIN	22,8	GR	11,4	50,2	39,1
P	1	P	2,3	L	11,9	L	28	35,5	59,9
DK	74	DK	60,3	IRL	33,8	GR	30,5	62,5	61,8

Table 2. Knowledge of foreign languages^a (in %)

	English		English, French, Italian, Spanish or Portuguese	
	1987	1999	1987	1999
Austria		51		54
Belgium	30	42	74	57
Germany	35	41	37	43
Denmark	52	76	59	81
Spain	9	17	18	23
France	20	30	31	36
Finland		51		52
Greece	25	39	32	42
Italy	11	28	23	40
Ireland			12	16
Luxembourg	40	53	99	89
Netherlands	60	78	71	85
Portugal	13	23	24	36
Sweden		77		79
UK			25	14

a) Percentage of the population who speak a foreign language well enough to take part in a conversation

Source: *Eurobarometer* 28, 1987 and 52, 1999.

Table 3. Identification with Europe (in %)

	1987	1992a	1992b	1999
Austria				52
Belgium	48	56	61	58
Denmark	56	38	58	51
Germany	42	52	51	44
Spain	62	61	64	67
France	53	53	69	60
Finland				38
Greece	55	61	61	40
Italy	51	58	74	73
Ireland	39	37	47	45
Luxembourg	65	64	72	76
Netherlands	34	42	58	56
Portugal	57	66	61	47
Sweden				38
UK	34	31	44	31

a) Question 1987 and 1992a: 'Do you ever think of yourself as not only (nationality) but also as European? Does this happen often, sometimes or never?' The percentage of respondents answering 'often' or 'sometimes' is indicated. Question 1992b and 1999: In the near future do you see yourself as ... (nationality) only, (nationality) and European, European and (nationality), European only?' The percentage of respondents choosing one of the last three answers is indicated.

Source: *Eurobarometer* 27, 1987; 37, 1992; 52, 1999.

Table 4. Disparity of living conditions between EU Member States

Notes and sources:

a) The ratios are calculated in such a way that the higher is the value the better is the situation; b) mean of the indicator values of all countries in % of the best situation; the lower this mean the greater the disparity.

(1) Eurostat, Statistics in Focus, 1/2002; 5/2002; (2) OECD, Annual National Accounts; (3) European Commission, National Accounts ESA, Detailed Tables 1970–1997; Statistical Yearbook on Candidate and South-East European Countries; (4) Federal Statistical Office of Germany, Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Ausland 2001; (5)–(7) International Telecommunication Union (); (8) (11) OECD, Education at a Glance; (9)(10) European Commission, Statistical Yearbook; (12) OECD, PISA Study; (13) (14) OECD, Employment Outlook; (15)–(18) OECD Health Data; (19) (24) (26) WHO, Health For All

Database; (20) (21) OECD, Social Expenditure Database; (22) (23) Eurostat, Statistics in Focus 4/2002; (25) 1998 or latest available year; OECD, Environmental Data Compendium

Material Wealth

- 1) GDP per Head in PPS at Current Prices, 2000
- 2) Private Consumption Expenditure/Head at Current Prices and PPS, 1999
- 3) Share of Expenditure for Food, Beverages and Tobacco (%), 1997
- 4) Passenger cars per 1000 Inhabitants, 1999

Communication Technology

- 5) Mobile Telephone Subscribers per 100 Inhabitants, 2000
- 6) PCs per 100 Inhabitants, 2000
- 7) Internet Users per 100 Inhabitants, 2000

Education

- 8) Expenditure per Student in Secondary Education in PPPs, 1998
- 9) Participation in Upper Secondary or Tertiary Education (%), 1998/99
- 10) Population aged 45-49 y. with at least Upper Secondary Education (%), 2000
- 11) Ratio of Pupils to Teaching Staff in Primary Education, 1999
- 12) Reading Literacy of Pupils Aged 15 Years, 2000

Employment

- 13) Labour Force Participation of Women (%), 2000
- 14) Unemployment Rate (%), 2000

Health

- 15) Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000), 2000
- 16) Life Expectancy of Men at Birth (in years), 1999
- 17) Practising Physicians per 1000 Inhabitants, 2000
- 18) Alcohol Consumption in Litres per Person aged 15 Years+, 2000
- 19) Consumption of Cigarettes per Year and Person aged 15 Years+, 1999

Social Protection

- 20) Share of Public Social Protection Expenditure in GDP (%), 1998
- 21) Public Social Protection Exp./Head at 1995 Prices and PPS (US\$), 1997

Transport

- 22) Length of Railway Net per 1000 square km (in km), 1999
- 23) Length of Motorways per 1000 square km (in km), 1999
- 24) Persons Killed or Injured in Road Accidents per 100.000 Inhabitants, 1999

Environment

- 25) Carbon Dioxide Emissions per Head (t), 1998
 - 26) Sulphur Dioxide Emissions per Head (kg), 1998
-

and candidate countries

EU countries				CZ	H	PL	Disparity between countries ^a	
best situation	value	worst situation	% of best ^a	in % of EU Member State with best situation ^a			EU	EU+ CZ, H, PL
L	44300	GR	35,2	29,8	26,0	20,1	54,6	49,7
L	17232	P	60,2	41,9	34,1	33,2	75,0	68,6
D	13,9	IRL	45,6	48,1	42,8	35,8	75,0	69,6
L	590	GR	43,1	56,8	40,3	40,7	71,2	67,0
A	77	F	64,1	54,8	39,9	22,7	84,6	77,0
S	50,7	GR	14	24,0	17,2	13,6	61,1	53,9
S	45,6	GR	20,8	21,3	15,6	15,8	55,6	49,3
A	8163	GR	40,3	39,0	26,2	17,6	68,3	61,1
S	93,1	P	53,7	44,4	59,5	70,7	72,2	69,7
D	82,6	P	20,1	100,6	87,7	96,6	71,1	75,1
DK	10,6	UK	47,1	45,3	101,9		70,0	70,5
FIN	546	L	80,8	90,1	87,9	87,7	91,3	90,8
S	76,4	I	60,6	83,4	69,0	78,4	80,5	79,9
L	2,4	E	17,3	27,3	37,5	14,6	44,2	41,3
S	3,4	GR	55,7	82,9	37,0	42,0	70,2	67,5
S	77	P	93,5	92,7	86,1	89,4	97,0	95,8
GR	4,4	UK	40,9	70,5	72,7	50,0	76,2	74,2
S	6,2	L	41,6	52,5	55,9	72,9	60,1	60,1
S	867	GR	25,6	39,0	30,3	28,7	49,4	46,6
S	31	IRL	50,9	62,7		73,7	79,0	77,7
L	8071	P	33,8	31,3		22,0	65,7	61,1
B	110	FIN	15,8	108,9	74,7	66,6	49,9	55,4
NL	57,6	IRL	2,4	11,0	8,4	1,5	36,4	31,5
FIN	183,6	B	25,7	52,2	71,2	94,4	51,8	55,3
P	5,4	L	32,1	46,2	94,7	65,1	63,7	64,5
S	5,5	GR	10,8	12,9	9,5	11,3	40,7	35,8

Table 5. Attachment to Europe and to the European Union (in %)

	Feeling very close/close to Europe ^a	Very/fairly proud to be European ^b	Identification with Europe ^c	Approval of EU Membership ^d	Trust in EU ^e
	1995	2001	2001	2001	2001
Austria	68	76	53	46	45
Belgium		67	53	62	61
Germany	58	56	59	59	48
Denmark		77	59	63	54
Spain	62	80	61	61	66
France		71	65	52	55
Finland		64	40	38	46
Greece		60	42	70	70
Italy	68	82	68	69	65
Ireland	44	81	44	83	63
Luxembourg		76	77	82	73
Netherlands	54	69	54	77	62
Portugal		77	48	67	69
Sweden	39	76	49	44	42
UK	22 ^f	55	28	38	31
Czech Republic	79	85	59	54	54
Hungary	94	93	50	66	71
Poland	70	87	65	57	55

a) Question: 'How close do you feel to (continent)?' very close, close, not very close, not close at all;

b) Question: 'And would you say you are very proud, fairly proud, not very proud, not at all proud to be

European?' c) Question: 'In the near future do you see yourself as ... (nationality) only, (nationality) and

European, European and (nationality), European only?' The percentage of respondents choosing one of

the last three answers is indicated. d) Question: 'Generally speaking do you think that (our country's)

membership of the European Union is (would be) a good thing, a bad thing, neither good nor bad?';

e) Percentage of respondents who tend to trust the EU vs. tend not to trust it/ don't know; f) Great

Britain.

Source: *International Social Survey Programme* 1995; *Eurobarometer* 56.2, 2001; *Candidate Countries Eurobarometer* 2001. (s. http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/cceb_en.htm)

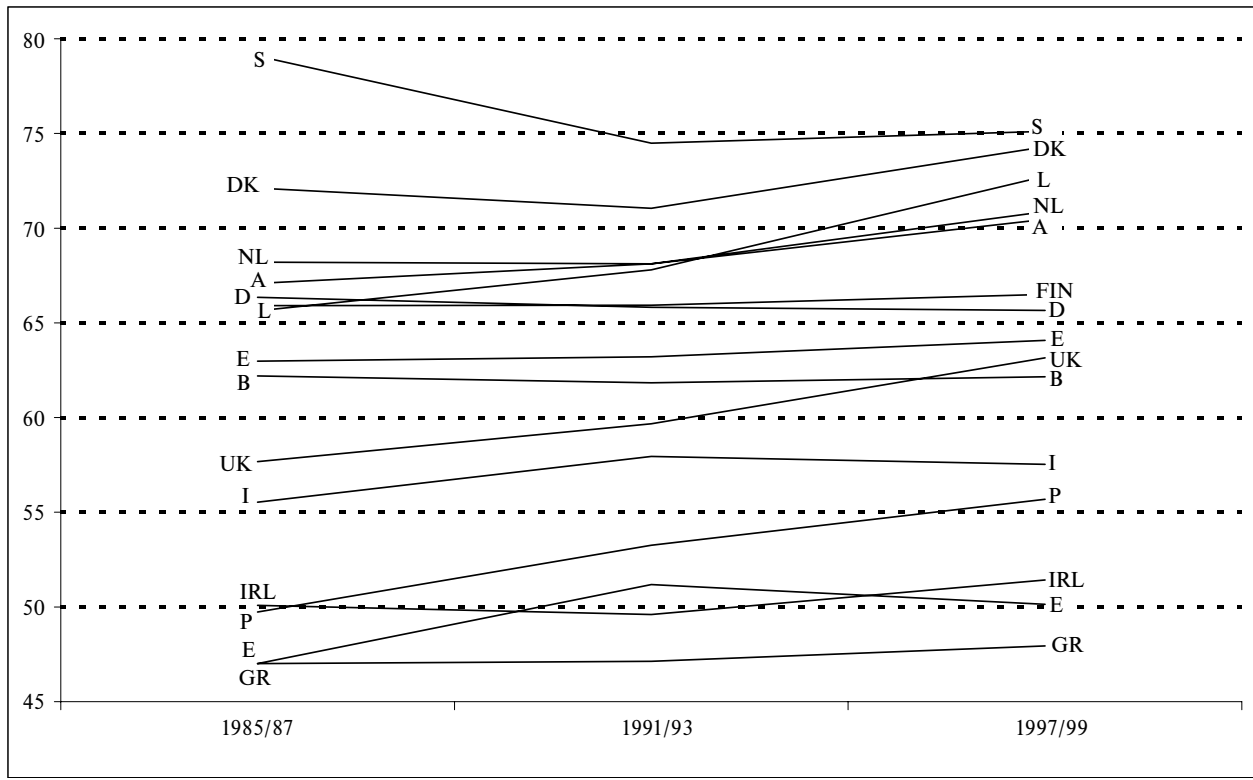
Table 6. Approval of the enlargement of the European Union on the part of the current Member States^a

	Czech Republic		Hungary		Poland		Switzerland		Norway	
	for	against	for	against	for	against	for	against	for	against
					in %					
Austria	37	51	65	27	34	54	83	10	81	11
Belgium	44	44	48	38	48	40	79	14	80	13
Germany	46	38	57	29	42	44	82	9	81	10
Denmark	66	26	66	26	72	22	89	8	91	6
Spain	53	18	53	19	53	19	71	8	68	9
France	28	53	33	50	36	48	66	25	64	26
Finland	53	28	60	23	49	31	80	8	84	6
Greece	63	22	66	21	65	23	83	8	79	11
Italy	49	30	55	26	54	28	79	9	79	11
Ireland	47	20	48	19	50	19	71	6	70	7
Luxembourg	54	31	52	32	50	36	81	11	82	8
Netherlands	51	32	53	31	53	31	84	9	84	8
Portugal	49	23	48	24	50	24	68	12	62	16
Sweden	72	16	73	15	75	15	87	7	89	6
UK	40	31	42	30	45	30	66	16	66	15
EU15	45	34	50	30	47	34	75	13	74	13

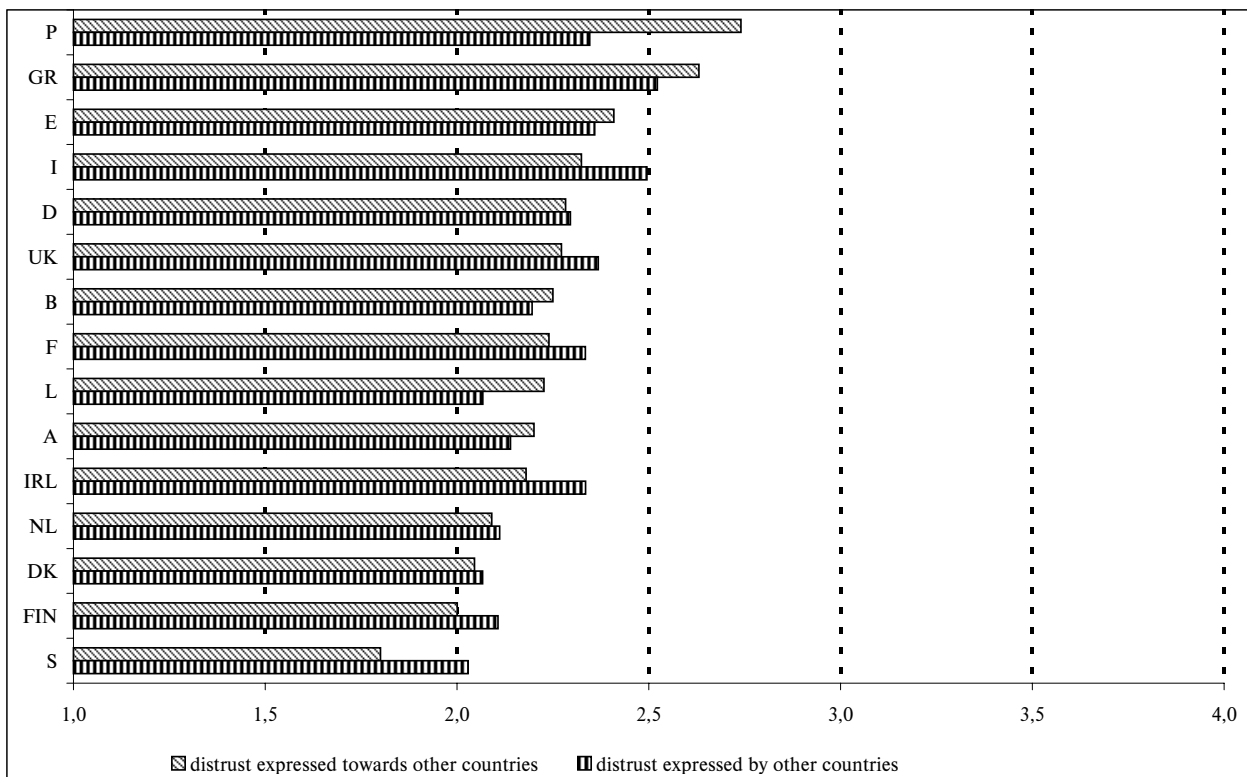
a) Question: 'For each of the following countries would you be in favour of or against it becoming part of the European Union in the future?'

Source: *Eurobarometer* 56.2, 2001.

Figure 1. Disparities in living conditions between EU Member States^a



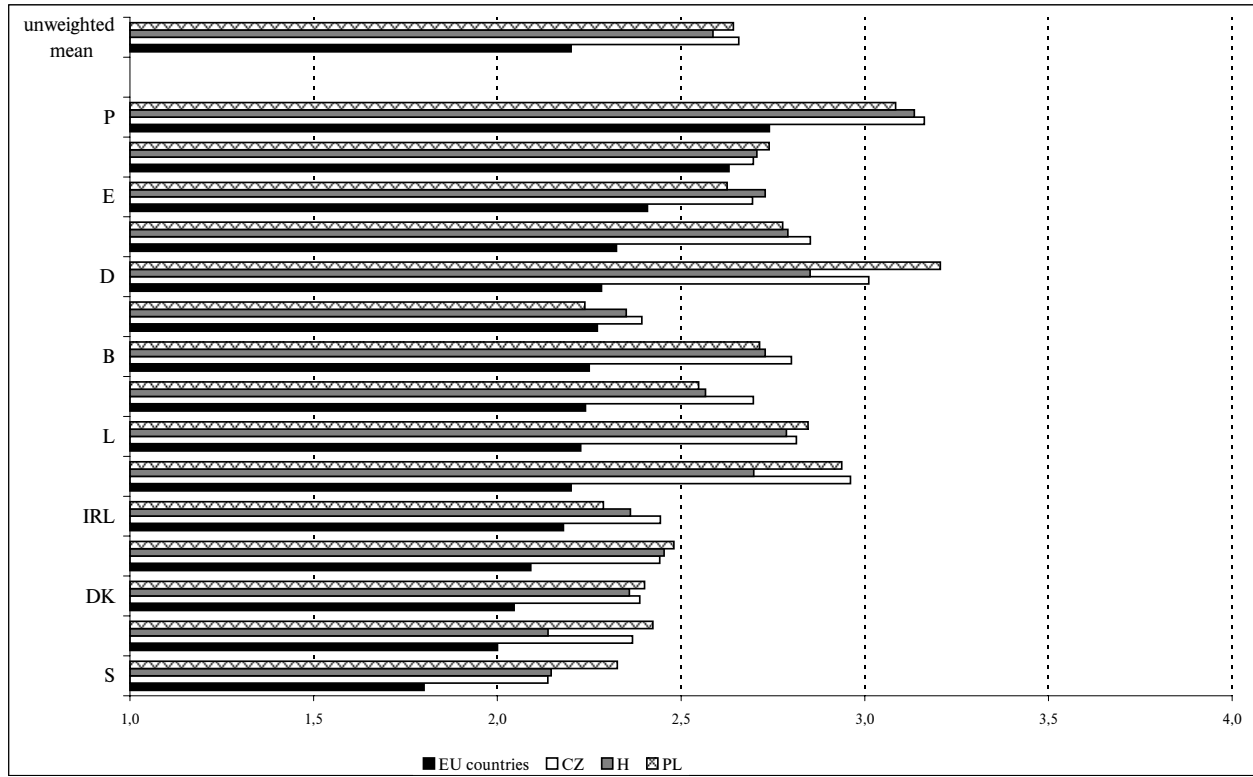
a) mean percentage relation to the best indicator value across all 22 indicators listed in Table 1.

Figure 2. Mean level of distrust towards other EU Member States and own trustworthiness^a

a) Question: I would like to ask you about how much trust you have in people from various countries? Response Scale: 1 = a lot of trust, 2 = some trust, 3 = not very much trust, 4 = No trust at all; the figure indicates the mean rating made by each EU Member State with respect to the other 14 countries and the unweighted mean rating received from them.

Source: Eurobarometer 46.0, 1996.

Figure 3. Mean level of distrust^a towards other EU Member States and candidate countries



a) Question: s. Figure 2.

Source: Eurobarometer 46.0, 1996.